

Elected Leaders Blast Bush on Sale of Ports to Arab Company

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

AREA - Officials denounced President George W. Bush and his administration for allowing six U.S. ports, including several in New York and New Jersey, to be operated by Dubai Ports World, a state-owned in the United Arab Emirates.

Dubai is seeking to purchase British-owned Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co., which operate commercial ports in Baltimore, Miami, New Jersey, New Orleans and New York.

Governor Jon Corzine announced Tuesday that the state would file federal and state lawsuits in state superior court in Newark to block the sale. "It is essential that we exercise extreme prudence in determining who will manage this area and take every precaution possible to ensure that all operators of the port can guarantee the greatest level of security to New Jersey residents."

State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield), a candidate for U.S. Senate, said "it is an outrage that

President Bush would allow the sale of American ports to a foreign-based company with ties to terrorism."

He said if the President "does not change course," he has asked Governor Corzine to exercise a provision in the lease between the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Port Newark Container Terminal, the current operator at Port Newark, to give the Port Authority "the ability to void the provisions of the lease if the transaction is contrary to public interest." Governor Corzine said that the Port Authority would seek to terminate its lease with Newark Terminal, noting the existing lease requires "prior written approval" by the Port Authority.

Congressman Mike Ferguson (R-7th) said in letters to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and House leaders that selling the ports to the Arab company "is not in America's national security interests." In his letter, he vowed to support legislation "to block this decision." Rep. Ferguson has called on House Speaker Dennis Hastert to immediately con-

vene congressional oversight hearings. He said he would support legislation to freeze the agreement until hearings are completed.

President Bush has vowed to allow the deal to proceed, saying he would veto any action by Congress to stop the transaction.

"I can understand why some in Congress have raised questions about whether or not our country will be less secure as a result of this transaction. But they need to know that our government has looked at this issue and looked at it carefully," he said Tuesday on the South Lawn of the White House.

"If there was any question as to whether or not this country would be less safe as a result of the transaction, it wouldn't go forward," he said.

"I also want to repeat something again, and that is, this is a company that has played by the rules, that has been cooperative with the United States, a country that's an ally in the war on terror, and it would send a terrible signal to friends and allies not to let this transaction go through." He said the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Customs would continue to manage security of the ports.

Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood), a candidate for Congress, said allowing the sale of the ports to occur would present a "security risk for New Jersey and will not keep us safe."

She said the Bush Administration "appears blinded by the lucrative deal" and has not considered the security risk to the region. "I think it is a mistake to allow this deal to proceed," she said.

"I am looking at a legislative response at the state level," she said, noting that New Jersey officials should be consulted to provide a security review "before we allow a transaction like this to occur."

She said the Republican-controlled Congress has authorized spending billions of dollars on the Iraq war rather than providing sufficient funds for protecting U.S. borders and securing United States ports.

"They (Congress and the Bush Administration) have failed us," Assemblywoman Stender said.

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Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
 NOT FOR SALE!...Port Elizabeth is busy as usual but citizens, mindful of 911 and the war on terror, are in shock that the Bush administration approved a port deal Monday turning operations over to an Arab government-owned company. The political malaise is boiling over as officials of both parties are standing up to a defiant President. Locally, the man on the street has few printable words to say on the matter.

Captain John Morgan Resigns As Westfield Parking Director

By VICTORIA MCCABE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Parking Director Captain John Morgan has tendered his resignation to Westfield Police Chief John Parizeau and Town Administrator Jim Gildea. The director of Westfield's parking services for the past three years, Captain Morgan sent a resignation letter to Chief Parizeau and Mr. Gildea on Tuesday, informing them of his decision to accept a job offer from an international parking-systems company.

According to Mr. Gildea, Captain Morgan has accepted a position as the national sales manager of the Metric Group, the company that Westfield employed to implement the pay-station parking system in downtown lots.

The town administrator announced Captain Morgan's resignation, effective March 3, to the town council and other attendees at Tuesday's meeting. He said that Captain Morgan had told him that he was considering Metric's job offer on Friday. Mr. Gildea spoke with Mayor Andy Skibitsky about the matter over the weekend, and after he relayed that conversation to Captain Morgan after

the holiday weekend, the parking director ultimately submitted his resignation letter.

"[Metric's] offer was too good to refuse," Mr. Gildea said.

The Metric Group is a European company that has installed more than 60,000 pay stations in 45 countries, according to the company's website. Chief Parizeau said that Metric is "trying to break into the U.S. market. Captain Morgan worked with them to set up the pay stations in Westfield from the very beginning, and they saw his value as an employee for them."

As Westfield's parking director, Captain Morgan oversaw all meter

personnel, as well as ticketing and processing procedures. He also worked with the town council, advising them on parking issues.

His resignation was "a surprise," the police chief said. "This was strictly a financial decision [for him]."

"This is a good opportunity for John, and it is also a good opportunity for us," Mr. Gildea said. "We'll do our best to make a smooth transition."

Both Chief Parizeau and Mr. Gildea said that they will meet over the next few weeks to discuss options for moving forward. They said that they will work together to decide whether to install a new person in the role of

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Westfield Council Discusses John Morgan's Resignation

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - At Tuesday's conference meeting, the council discussed Parking Director John Morgan's resignation, ramifications of a personnel shift at the Department of Public Works and the remediation of lot eight. Administrator Jim Gildea informed the council that Captain Morgan had tendered his resignation. Mr. Gildea said the issue "came up late Friday and today (Tuesday)."

"I have accepted a resignation letter of our Parking Director John Morgan. He has been offered a position as the national sales manager of Metric Parking. They're the company that we actually hired to do all our pay stations. The offer was too good to refuse. We had a discussion Friday and I spoke to the mayor about it over the weekend just to let him know. He's aware of it. It's going to be a loss for us."

"At the end of the day, during the three years he was here, we've grown by leaps and bounds," Mr. Gildea continued.

In terms of filling the vacancy and in keeping in mind the mayor's motto of "doing more with less," Mr. Gildea said he would confer with new Police Chief John Parizeau and the mayor to "see what's suitable under our current needs." Captain Morgan's last day will be March 3.

Acting Mayor Mark Ciarrocca, who chaired the Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Committee last year, said "I worked very closely with John (Morgan) to devise the parking plan and a lot of the improvements in parking system are the result of a lot of John's work. He was a real asset to the town as we talked about how we were going to transform our parking system and improve our downtown lots and increase capacity."

Calling the decision "timely," Acting Mayor Ciarrocca said the new police chief and Mayor Andy Skibitsky will meet to discuss possibly "reallocating work" in Captain Morgan's absence.

Councilwoman Jo Ann Neylan gave an update on the Public Works Committee, submitting the list of roads to be improved and milled over the next year, with many streets carried over from 2005. With an eye towards the impending budget, Councilwoman Neylan categorized this year's ap-

proach as an "aggressive but balanced stance."

Under a new policy, paving will end on or about November 15 to limit the amount of carryovers and still address leaf pickup and snow removal concerns. The estimate for the proposed streets, which includes Prospect Street, Ferris Place, Karen Terrace, Mountain View Terrace, Boulevard, Coddling Road, Lynwood Place and Hyslip Avenue, came to under \$1 million.

Also, Councilwoman Neylan said "under the guidance of First Ward Councilman Peter Echausse," her committee studied the possibility of transferring public works staff to the recreation department. Though the logistics are not set yet, the idea would be for perhaps four workers to be shifted to the recreation department in order to maintain and monitor the fields, with the objective of being "more user friendly." This exchange would occur in a trial capacity between April 1 and October 31 because it represents the peak season for field maintenance requests.

She explained that the workers "would not sit idle" during the fall and winter seasons when leaves and snow removal present a heavy workload; rather, the plan would shift their responsibilities from field maintenance to more traditional public works initiatives starting November 1. The councilwoman was assured that "user groups support the idea" and hopes to have the support of the Teamsters Union, who represents public works employees.

Councilman Echausse said the arrangement allows the town to take field maintenance "to the next level" and anticipates "further cooperation with the board of education" to the point where the town creates "one entity dealing with the fields on a shared services basis."

Responding to public comment, Mr. Gildea said remediation of Elm Street's lot eight is progressing well. The company in charge of clean up found an extra tank, in addition to the four identified by the town's consultants, and final arrangements to remove contaminated soil around the center island of the lot will continue. According to Mr. Gildea, work will be finalized in a week or two. In addition, he said the town is "pursuing reimbursement for some or all of the project."

Dr. Petix Retires As WF High School Principal

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - After 26 years as Westfield High School's Principal, Dr. Robert Petix announced his retirement effective June 30. Only the school's fourth principal since 1923, Dr. Petix has seen more than 10,000 students graduate from WHS during his tenure. He said he mullied his departure for years, this year "everything came into place."

"The school is in good shape; I don't think there's any unfinished business that I'll hand over to my successor," he said. "The major reason I'm leaving is because I'm older. I'm 63 years old and people say there'll come a time when you don't want to be here anymore. My enthusiasm not only has not waned; it's gotten greater, greater than ever."

A French teacher before beginning his tenure as assistant principal in 1974 and principal in 1980, his years in leadership positions allowed him to describe the attributes necessary to be successful at Westfield High School. "There are a lot of forces," he said. "There are teachers, parents and the board of education, which is more involved in day-to-day operation of the school than it ever was. I would hope that he or she would have the inner strength to listen to all of the 'stakeholders.' You need someone who respects academic integrity and has the stomach to take criticism."

Saying he'll "miss it all," letting go will be a learning process. Talking about a Middle Student study, which examines the school's emphasis on motivating students in neither the highest or lowest rungs of academic achievement who may perceive themselves to be neglected, Dr. Petix, in the past week, familiarized himself with the issue's foundations. Now, going against instinct, Dr. Petix knows the issue is one in which he may make suggestions, but ultimately, the decision is out of his hands.

"I think 'gee, next year we'll do this' and then I realize 'oh wait, I'm not going to be here.' I miss not moving ahead with that (Middle Students

study), but I'll have to adjust to that. It is hard. But that's life."

Assistant Principal Bob Eyre, hired in June 1975 by Dr. Petix to teach English, said it is "hard to imagine a day in WHS without seeing or hearing Bob Petix," adding that he was "stunned" by the announcement.

Mr. Eyre categorized Dr. Petix as "an intellectual to begin with, and he has a PhD in Philosophy, which makes him a rare bird. He has led us to value intellectual debate and inquiry. In this high school, I felt I could debate and discuss subjects in my classes that in other schools would be taboo."

Under the umbrella of diversity, Mr. Eyre described Dr. Petix as having "done tremendous amounts in the areas of African-American awareness, the role of young women in the school and the gay/straight alliance. Other schools have

looked to us as a model in those areas." Fellow Assistant Principal Noah Tennant called the principal's retirement an "end of an era. He created an environment of inclusiveness and was baffled by closed-mindedness."

Dr. Petix spoke of his experience recovering from a heart bypass in his first year as principal. Calling the bypass "the best thing that ever happen to me," he said it put into focus even more that "you only have one life and make most of it."

Besides personal trials, Dr. Petix has led the school through two student deaths and a teacher's suicide. Dr. Petix recalled September 11, 2002, though, as his most difficult day. Exactly a year following the collapse of the trade towers, a windstorm dislodged a 1,500-pound tree limb, falling on, and ultimately killing, 14-year-old Greta Schoenemann.

"Clearly, the toughest day for me ever was when Greta (Schoenemann) died," he said. "That was awful, a ninth-grade student dying from a tree right outside my window. That's always been the toughest day for me."

Though taking his job seriously, he

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Dr. Robert Petix

County Reverses Position, Scraps Proposed Farm Idea

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

ELIZABETH - A capacity audience at the Union County administrative building last Thursday protested a proposed Green Meadows Children's Farm at the site of the former Scotch Plains-based Sevell Ponderosa property. Residents raised environmental, engineering, traffic and health concerns to the board, which, after retiring for a 30-minute closed session, reversed its initial decision and scrapped the children's farm project altogether.

Following the meeting, crowds who hours earlier grilled county representatives and assailed the idea as a "profit-making scheme" "rammed down our throats," were seen shaking hands with freeholders and thanking them for listening to the community's concerns.

At 8:35 p.m., after discussing regular board business, Chairman Al Mirabella said the county acted as a "good neighbor" in buying the property to save the area from the development of townhouses. Freeholder Mirabella said the county's interest was in the property not remaining "dormant" and felt the current proposal "would be consistent with the continued use of an existing farm." While saying that the county did its best to consider work with "the least traffic impact to the community (of the options considered)," and touting Green Meadows proprietor Tim Keyes as a "good corporate neighbor," he regretted a "breakdown in communication." When asked, Freeholder Mirabella indicated that the lease with Green Meadows had not been signed. County Manager George Devanney

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Detective Chambers Returns To Work After Suspension

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - A suspended Westfield police officer returned to work Tuesday after opting not to appeal the 15-day suspension imposed by the town for fixing a parking ticket for her son.

Detective Sandra Chambers returned to her job Tuesday as a detective in the police department's juvenile detective bureau, according to Town Administrator Jim Gildea.

"I received notification (last Friday) from her attorney that she has accepted the penalty, so she is back at work today," Mr. Gildea told *The Westfield Leader* Tuesday morning. "So there will be no appeal."

Mr. Gildea said Police Chief John Parizeau would meet with Detective Chambers "to discuss procedures and to get her back in the fold." Chief Parizeau replaced the retired former chief Bernard Tracy in Janu-

ary.

Hearing Officer James Damato found Detective Chambers guilty on five of seven charges by a disciplinary hearing officer for having a parking ticket for her son voided. Detective Chambers was found guilty of official misconduct, neglect of duty, "illegal reduction or deletion of a parking summons for personal gain," conduct unbecoming of a police officer and using one's authority to influence or modify an action of another officer. Two charges of false swearing were dismissed.

In his decision Mr. Damato cited the detective's "exemplary service to town. Chambers was, and I believe is, a valuable member of the Westfield Police Department."

Mr. Gildea concurred with Mr. Damato's ruling, which was non-binding, and imposed the 15-day suspension, "as a forfeiture of accrued vacation time" as recommended by Mr. Damato.



Michael Pollack for The Westfield Leader and The Times
 FREE CHEERS...Scotch Plains residents who galvanized and filled the Union County Administrative Building to voice concerns over an "interactive farm" being placed on Cooper Road, stand and applaud the Union County Freeholders after they reversed an earlier decision and ultimately sided with the residents.

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